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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION BOYCOTT THREATENS LEGITIMACY OF
SENEGALESE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: 06 DAKAR 2737

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER OSMAN N. TAT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Alleging gerrymandering, Senegal,s leading opposition parties have formed an alliance to boycott the June 3 parliamentary election. President Wade, whom the opposition also accuses of manipulating electoral rolls, continues to dismiss calls to postpone for a third time. The press is rife with speculation as to what this boycott will do to Senegal,s democracy, as this is the first time that a group has resorted to a technique that could translate into the absence of any meaningful parliamentary opposition. This boycott may herald a more radical chapter in Senegalese politics. END SUMMARY.

HOW WILL THE ELECTION WORK?

12. (C) Senegal,s legislative election system is based on the parallel voting system. In this system the 150 seats in the National Assembly are divided into those that will be chosen on the basis of a party bloc vote, 60, and those that will come out in mostly multi-member electoral districts, 90. In the first tally each vote goes towards a national total with electors voting for a party list. The number of members of parliament a party eventually gets depends on the percentage of votes that a party wins of the national total. Thus, if the total number of votes cast is one million and Wade,s party wins 50 percent, his party will be awarded 30 of the 60 seats up for grabs. Then in order to determine the remaining 90 seats, the votes are counted in a voter,s department. Thus if 500,000 people voted in the department of Dakar, which has say 10 seats allocated to it, and Wade,s party wins 50 percent of that vote, his party will have then won 5 seats. (NOTE: These numbers are hypothetical. END NOTE.)

WHO IS THE OPPOSITION? WHAT DO THEY WANT?

13. (C) The principal opposition parties, who call themselves &Siggil Senegal8 (restoring dignity to Senegal), number 12 parties and include second place presidential contender Idrissa Seck,s Rewmi Party, the Socialist Party, Abdoulaye Bathily,s Democratic League and Moustapha Niasse,s Alliance Force for Progress. In total these parties garnered 36.62 percent of the vote in the February 25 presidential election. In contrast, the 14 parties, not including the Democratic Party of Senegal (PDS), who will contest the June 3 election and who also contested the presidential election accounted for 6.14 percent of that vote with four supporting the PDS. Siggil Senegal leaders, who are currently touring Senegal to take their case to the people, are demanding the dismissal of

Interior Minister Osman Ngom and the postponement of the election so as to redraw the electoral boundaries to more accurately reflect Senegal,s demographic apportionment.

OPPOSITION ACCUSES WADE OF MANIPULATION

14. (C) Siggil Senegal is boycotting the election because the parties assert Wade gerrymandered the electoral rolls and departmental boundaries to distinctly favor his PDS. In spite of Council of State rulings)- one siding with them and one siding against them)- the parties argue that decree increasing the number of seats in certain departments, where the PDS is strong, are fraudulent as there has not been a concomitant increase in population. They further allege that those departments where the PDS is weak have seen a drop in the number of seats allocated despite having larger populations. In the last elections the seats were allocated proportionally. Wade has decreed that seat allocation be made based on the importance of a department. Thus, the departments of Zinguichor, Tambacounda and Bignona have 2 seats each even though their population is larger than the departments of Guediawaye (3), Tivaouane (3), Mbour (4), Thies (4) and Diourbel (3).

A WEAK JUDICIARY

15. (C) The crisis is compounded by a weak judiciary. While the Constitutional Court has consistently refused to rule on the validity of the amendments introduced by Wade, the Council of State has bent backwards to rule in favor of the regime even going as far as contradicting its own December 2006 decision when it ruled that Wade,s reapportionment was unconstitutional. The opposition alleges collusion between the Council of State and President Wade as the elections are

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going ahead based on a very slightly modified reapportionment decree that they argue is still unconstitutional.

IS A POSTPONEMENT POSSIBLE?

16. (S) Wade has already postponed the legislative elections twice and a third time might be possible if domestic and international pressure mounts. Opinions in Senegal,s leading newspapers are divided with some opining that a lack of a credible opposition will seriously damage Senegal,s democratic system and further weaken an already ailing parliament. Others argue that the opposition has committed political suicide as the parties will become irrelevant for the next five years. The European Union (EU) has already demarched the Government to postpone the election, arguing that the opposition boycott is not good for Senegal. French Ambassador Andre Parant reportedly told EU colleagues that the Government postponed for poor reasons twice; so it could postpone for a good reason a third time. In a conversation with Poloffs, the extremely influential spokesman of the Tidjane Brotherhood, Abdoul Aziz Sy al Ibn (Junior), told us that he would do what he could to intervene with President Wade to persuade him of his view that an election without an opposition was detrimental to the peace and fraternity of Senegal.

17. (C) Presidential spokesman El Hady Amadou Sall denied that the President would see the opposition after his trip to Brazil and underlined that elections would go ahead as scheduled. Meanwhile, the opposition says that the meeting has already been set. One key opposition figure told PolOff, &We are certain to lose if we go to legislative elections.8 Opposition figures have also asserted that they would have to resort to the streets using students and unions to destabilize the regime.

COMMENT

18. (C) For now, the postponement debate is being waged in the media. If the election does go ahead, it is certain that

the PDS will win a landslide victory. What is also certain is that Senegal will have moved back to a de facto one-party.
END COMMENT.

19. (U) Visit Embassy Dakar,s SIPRNET website at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/af/dakar>.
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